2013

A Journey over Land and Sea

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A JOURNEY OVER LAND AND SEA

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Submitted to:
The Connecticut College Department of Music
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Bachelor of Arts with Honors in the Major Field
Concentration in Composition

Connecticut College
New London, CT
5/3/2013

ABSTRACT

A Journey Over Land And Sea is a 15-minute composition for orchestra. It comprises two movements which contrast in form and musical language. Work consisted of composing, orchestrating, scoring, and preparing the piece for a performance by the Connecticut College Orchestra. Working with the orchestra at rehearsals required close collaboration with the conductor and provided opportunities to revise parts of the piece and make decisions about interpretation. A Journey Over Land And Sea was premiered at an honors thesis concert on 4/18/13 and performed again at the Connecticut College Orchestra spring concert on 5/2/13.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my thesis advisers, Professors Art Krieger, Mark Seto, and Midge Thomas, who encouraged me to pursue this project and without whose help it could never have come to fruition.

Thank you to the Connecticut College Orchestra, and Mark Seto again as a conductor, for dedicating hours upon hours of practice and rehearsal time to this piece, and for giving two excellent performances of it.

And finally, thank you to my friends and family, my fellow musicians at Connecticut College, and everyone who came to the performances.

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CHAPTER 1 – COMPOSITION AND ORCHESTRATION

Introduction

A Journey Over Land And Sea is an original composition for a classical-sized orchestra. It comprises two movements; the first is based on sonata form and pays homage to the symphonic tradition as understood by composers like Beethoven and Brahms, while the second blends together a diverse group of styles. My work for this project included writing the piece, arranging it for a variety of orchestral instruments, and preparing the score and parts for a performance by the Connecticut College Orchestra. I completed most of the composition during the Fall 2012 semester so that the orchestra would have time to rehearse the piece before their spring concert on May 2, 2013. During the spring semester, I attended orchestra rehearsals twice a week to help make decisions about interpretation, clarify notational questions, and make revisions. In this paper, I will discuss the inspiration and writing process for the piece, and then explain its musical construction, addressing issues of structure, harmonic language, musical elements that create unity, and compositional processes.

Inspiration and influence

Composers sometimes like to align themselves with a particular ideology, a vision of what music should seek to do or represent, or ideas about musical progress and pushing boundaries. My aim was not to do any of these things; as a young composer still searching for an individual style and a relatively inexperienced orchestrator, I treated this piece first and foremost as an exercise in craftsmanship. I chose sonata form as a starting point for the first movement in part as a personal challenge, to try and reinterpret a historical convention and find new life in it.

For the second movement, I gave myself the opposite challenge: to avoid formal conventions and tonal functions.

I drew inspiration for this piece from a wide variety of musical sources, all of which would be difficult to enumerate, but there are certain composers and pieces that entered prominently into my thinking. I considered Stravinsky's *The Firebird* as a model for combining different methods of pitch organization into one work. Stravinsky also provided inspiration for abrupt shifts in texture and mood. I was influenced by Debussy's *La Mer* and *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* in my approaches to harmony and orchestration, especially in the second movement. I listened to the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms as inspiration for the first movement. Mahler's symphonies, the First and Fifth in particular, also gave me ideas about symphonic form and orchestration. I also studied music by David Del Tredici and Kenneth Fuchs for models of contemporary composers who use tertian harmony and tonal forms in their works.

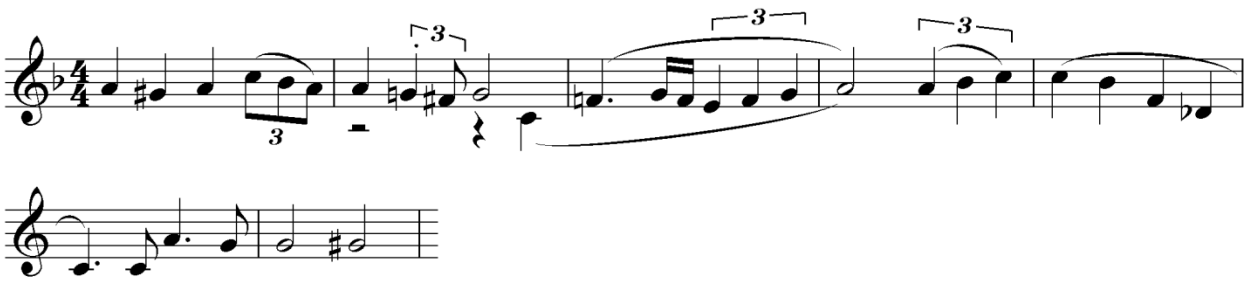
I was also influenced by music written for something other than an orchestra. As a pianist, I could not help but to be influenced by the pieces I was playing while writing this piece. Debussy's *L'Isle Joyeuse* gave me ideas about harmony and scales, especially the whole-tone scale and the ways the lydian and mixolydian modes relate to it. Beethoven's *Les Adieux* sonata gave me close contact with sonata form and inspired me to imagine it differently. I also incorporated rock and jazz influences into this piece. One section in the second movement uses jazz-inspired chord voicings to slide between whole-tone and diatonic material. The timpani parts in the middle section of the first movement and throughout the second movement are inspired by the aggressive drumming in certain styles of rock music. In the middle section of the first movement, from mm. 90-98 and 116-126, they are loud and driving, while in the second movement they are more subtle and are often used as background parts.

I came up with the title, "*A Journey Over Land And Sea,*" when the piece was already completed. I felt that it captures both the contrast and unity between the two movements, and gives a sense of the character of the piece as a whole. I think it is only natural to assume from the title and the two-movement structure that the first movement in some way embodies the idea of land, and the second the idea of the sea. I did not plan those associations when writing the piece, but I would not discourage them entirely; the first movement feels grounded and stable, while the second is more free and flowing.

Writing process

I began the writing process by brainstorming for a musical idea that could form the basis for entire composition. I wanted something simple enough that I could alter it in various ways and have it reappear as something barely recognizable, but also with enough rhythmic and melodic interest to have a strong character. During my brainstorming, I was originally thinking about writing a theme and variations. I came up with the main theme of the first movement and decided to construct the rest of the piece around it in some way. However, I discarded the idea of variation form and chose instead to write two contrasting movements based on the theme. I saw the first two measures as the most important part of the theme, since I constructed the following measures around them and as a response to them. Here is the theme in its entirety :

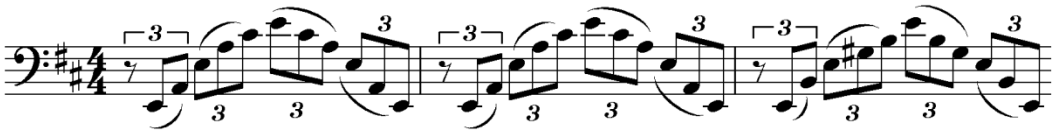
Figure 1 – Main theme, Vl. I, mm. 18 - 24



During most of the process, I worked on the two movements concurrently, although I did begin the first movement before the second. This was a conscious decision; I wanted to have the flexibility to make major changes in one movement if I came up with a new idea for the other. I was particularly interested in unity throughout the writing process, and often jumped back and forth between the movements while writing. I was always mindful of how each new section would relate to the other movement.

I used Sibelius 6 to notate the piece. Although Sibelius has MIDI playback, it does not sound much like a real orchestra, so I tried to use it as only the most basic guide for orchestration, and relied primarily on my imagination. I compared my work to scores by other composers to get an idea of what certain parts might sound like. On a few occasions, I met with individual members of the orchestra to hear what something sounded like on their instrument. I worked out some parts at the piano and orchestrated them afterwards, but other parts were conceived entirely for orchestra. Even while writing at the piano, I tried to imagine how the notes would sound on different instruments. The remnants of a pianistic texture can be seen in the bassoon and cello line in parts of the second movement. Here is an example from mm. 212 – 214, in which the arpeggiated figure resembles something the left hand might play on a piano:

Figure 2 – Cello, mm. 212-214



After I completed the piece, the Connecticut College Orchestra began rehearsing it in January of 2013. I attended most of their rehearsals and changed several parts when they did not sound how I expected them to. At this stage, most of my revisions related to articulations and

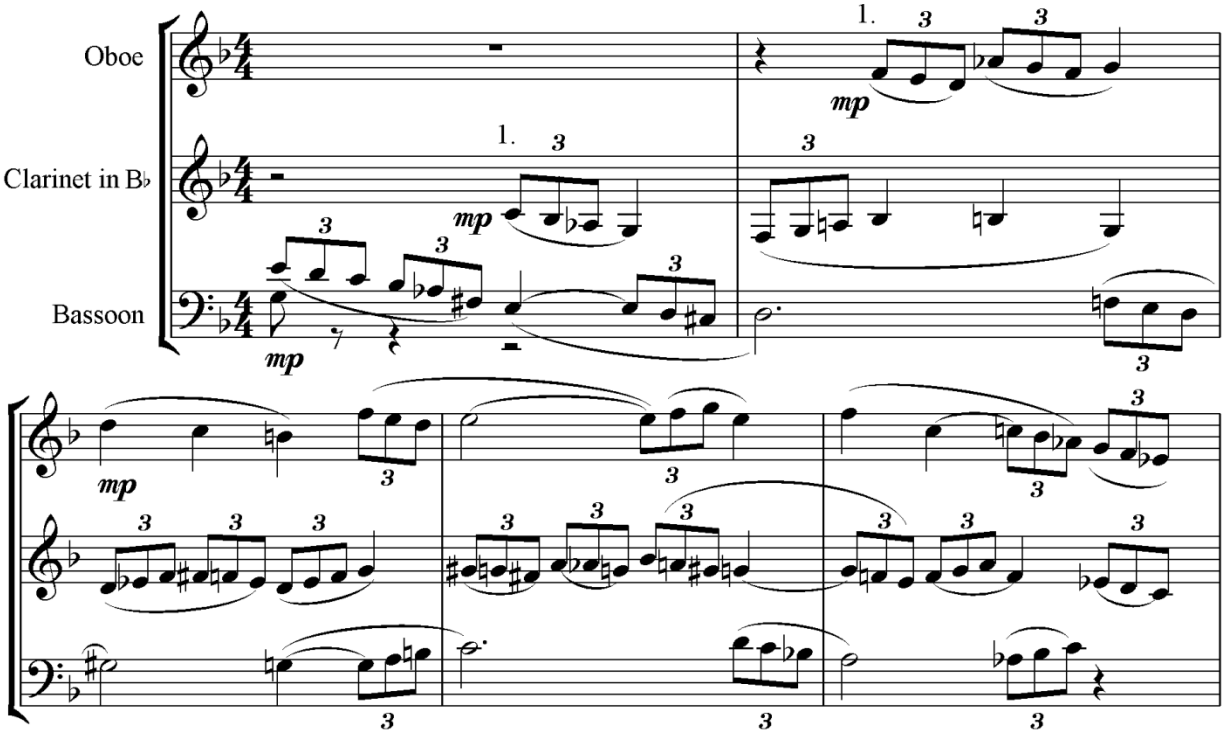
slurring. I finalized the score after the first performance on April 18, 2013; it appears here in its completed form.

Orchestration

I wrote this piece specifically to be performed by the Connecticut College student orchestra. The exact number of performers varies from year to year, but the composition of the orchestra is usually similar to that of a classical orchestra. I scored my piece for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, timpani, and strings. While I did not have exact numbers of string players while writing, I assumed that the sections would be small, so I tried to avoid too many divisi parts in the second violins and the violas and never divided the cellos or basses. Small sections provided a number of challenges: sometimes, I would try to score chords for brass only to realize that there were not enough brass instruments to play all the notes I wanted. Measures 241- 244 are an example of a passage in which I had to use creative orchestration to achieve the effects I wanted. I wanted the texture in m. 241 to sound brassy, and then wanted to layer additional brass instruments in m. 243, but if I saved brass instruments for m. 243, there wouldn't be enough to play all the chord voices in mm. 241 – 242. My solution was to have the bassoons play with the brass in mm. 241 – 242 to fill out the chords. There were several other instances throughout the piece where I had the woodwinds play with the brass or vice versa in order to achieve the effects I wanted. In general, I tried to write for each instrument within comfortable ranges and without the use of extended technique. This was for the most part a matter of practicality: I knew I was writing for student musicians and wanted to keep the level of difficulty manageable. The low Db on the trombone in m. 109 is the only a time an instrument plays outside its standard range.

I usually conceived of each section as a unit, but in a few places, I grouped instruments in different ways to achieve certain effects. In mm. 133 – 146, the first oboe, clarinet, and bassoon are supposed to feel like a separate group from the rest of the orchestra. They play a contrapuntal pattern mostly in triplets that implies the same harmony as the theme played in the orchestra, but features completely different melodies. These two textures are played at the same time, and the orchestra gradually swells and takes over the woodwind texture. The following example shows these three instruments:

Figure 3 – Ob. 1, Cl. 1, Bsn. 1, mm. 133 - 137



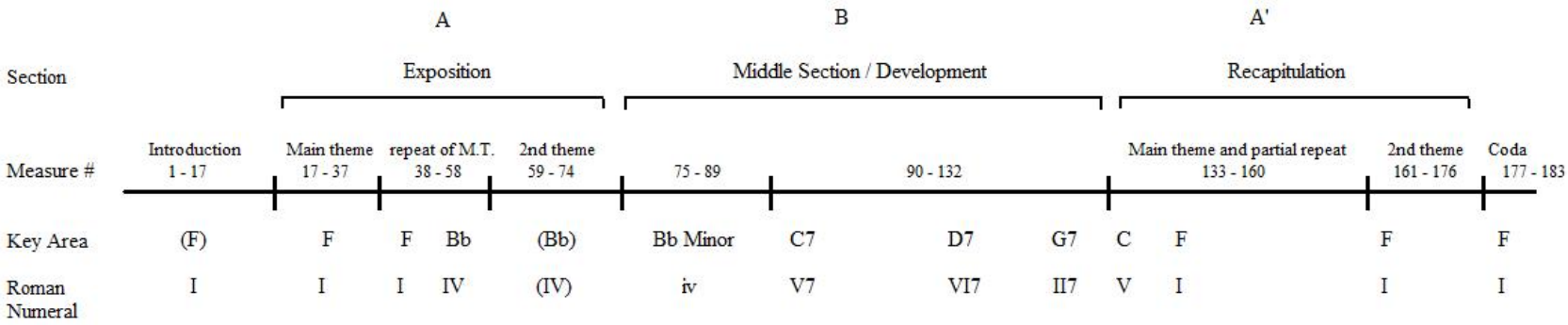
Similarly, in mm 271 – 274, I chose to avoid conventional instrumental divisions. Groups of two or three instruments play together, and the strings coalesce into a unit for the last two measures, but most of the instruments either join with an instrument from another section or play their own distinctive part. I wanted to create a sense of the entire orchestra as a unit rather than

sections as units. I used similar ideas for a different purpose in mm. 251 – 254. Here, the entire texture is based on an aggressive sixteenth-note triplet figure. I wanted to employ rich, dark colors while making sure the triplet motive would be heard clearly each time. To accomplish this, I paired each instrument with one from a different section: flute with horn, clarinet with violin, and bassoon with cello.

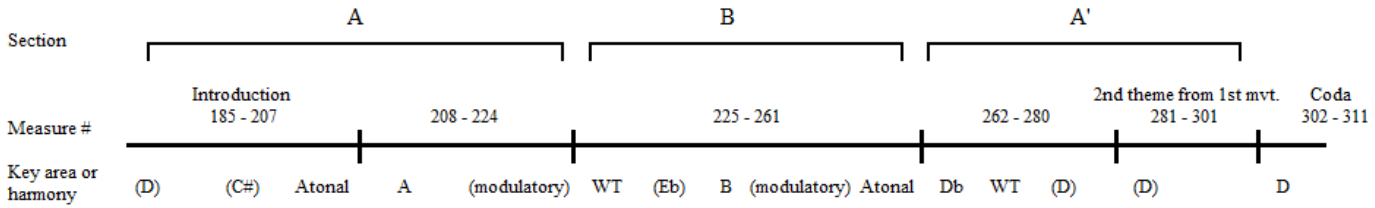
Form and Harmonic Language

The first movement is based on sonata form, although it deviates from it in many respects. The form chart on the following page shows major sections and key areas. The exposition is played once in F, and begins again in F major before modulating to Bb major. The second theme is harmonically unstable, but prepares Bb as a tonal center. The middle section behaves differently in some ways from a conventional development. It contains only small fragments of the exposition themes, which are difficult to recognize as the same material. One section is in a different time signature and another is at a faster tempo. The first portion of the development is set in a slow 6/4, in Bb minor. Then new material appears in C major and is partially repeated in D major. Mm. 127 – 132 pause on a G^7 chord, giving a sense of standing on the dominant. A strong cadence occurs on the downbeat of m. 133, and a recapitulation begins in the "wrong" key of C. The first seven measures are then repeated, and modulate back to F major, in the same way that the repeat in the exposition modulated to Bb. The rest of the recapitulation continues in F and the second theme is transposed accordingly. Most of the recapitulation is literal, with additional embellishments of melodic lines and more intricate textures. The coda is in F major, and recalls a chain of chords used in the exposition.

Form of movement I



Form of movement II



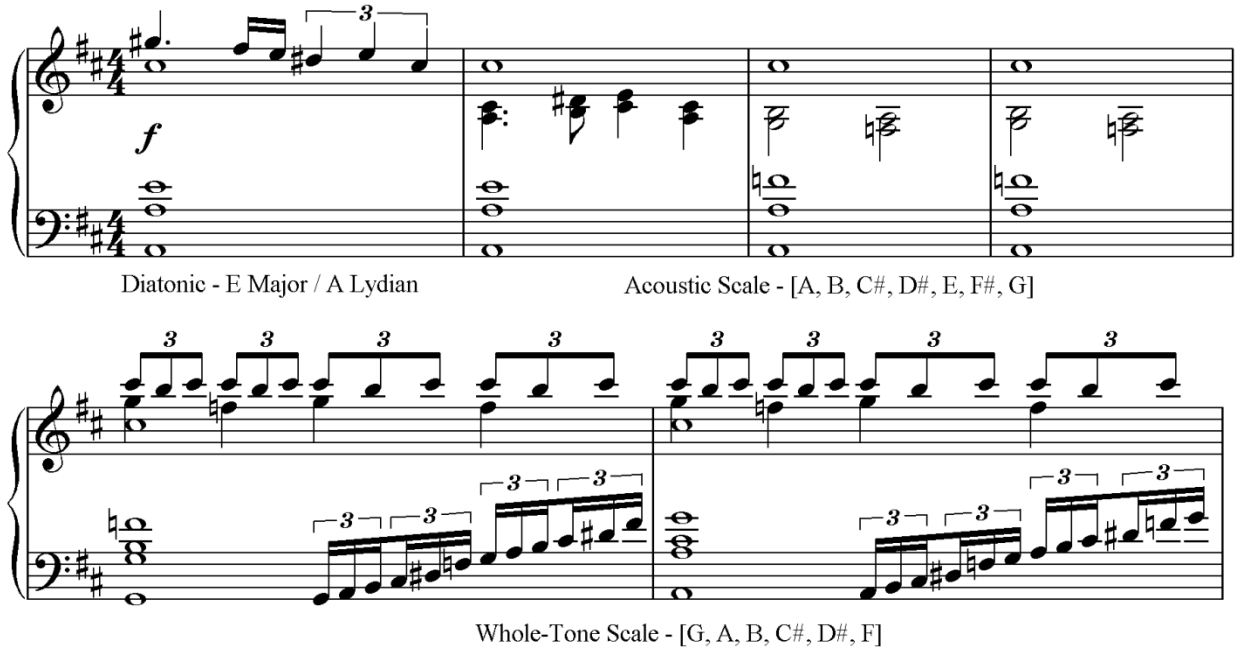
In terms of harmonic language, the first movement is based on common practice tonal harmony. The main theme follows most of the conventional rules of voice leading and harmonic progression. Other parts of the movement use more chromaticism and non-functional harmony, but there is always a clear tonal center. The introduction, for example, includes melodic material that is dissonant with the underlying harmony, but a sustained F pedal provides a strong center. Measures 90 – 111 and 119 – 126 also have pedal points, but are based on the acoustic scale [C, D, E, F#, G, A, Bb], a synthetic scale named for its resemblance to a portion of the harmonic series. In the second movement, I exploited its similarities to the diatonic and whole-tone scales, but in these passages it stands on its own. Likewise, whole-tone scales and augmented triads are harmonically important in the second movement, while in the first (mm. 24, 44, 131-133, 139-140) they are used only to generate chromaticism within an otherwise tonal context.

The second movement is much freer in form than the first. It was conceived around ternary form, but material from the first section is not repeated literally in the third section, and certain parts are played out of order or presented in a markedly different way. I would describe it as ABA', with the A section at m. 185, the B section at m. 223, and A' at m. 260. At 281, material from the first movement returns to form a coda. The sections are not determined by cadences or key area so much as by motivic content and musical contour.

The musical language of the second movement is based on tertian harmony, but doesn't always have a clear function or tonal center. Although the harmony is relatively free, the key signature is that of D major, and there are three strong resolutions to D major. Some passages use acoustic scales and the whole-tone scale as well as the diatonic scale, while others are atonal or based on parallel motion. I saw this mix of musical languages as a source of harmonic conflict, and so my goal in this movement was to bring all these ideas together by the end of the piece.

The A section contains an introduction in the D acoustic scale, an atonal passage loosely based on the whole-tone scale, and some lyrical phrases in A major. The B section contains rapidly shifting harmony including whole-tone material, modulatory tonal material, and a group of parallel half-diminished chords, before arriving at a climactic atonal section based on the main theme of the first movement. The goal of the A' section is to resolve the tension between the tonal and atonal material. Mm. 260 – 270 move from diatonic harmony to whole-tone harmony by way of the acoustic scale in mm. 268-269. The following example is a piano reduction of mm. 265 – 271, and shows how the acoustic scale is used to move smoothly from diatonic to whole-tone material:

Figure 4 – Piano Reduction of mm. 265- 271



The bass motion in mm. 270 – 273 implies a simple tonal progression, IV – V – vi – I – V, but the harmony is entirely based on the whole-tone scale. The move to a D dominant seventh on the downbeat of m. 274 has the weight of a strong cadence, even though it is actually an augmented triad moving to a dominant. Measures 274 – 280 represent the harmonic goal of the piece: a

fusion of tonal harmony and the whole-tone scale. After a quotation from the first movement, the coda reaffirms the relationship between the diatonic scale and the whole-tone scale by treating the whole-tone collection as a harmony that can resolve to a major chord.

CHAPTER 2: UNITY IN A LARGE SCALE COMPOSITION

Unity

From the beginning of this project, unity was one of my main interests. As I mentioned earlier, I originally conceived the piece as a set of variations on the main theme of the first movement. Ultimately, as it grew, it took a different shape, and I discarded the variations, with two exceptions. One was soft and impressionistic, with little resemblance to the original theme. With a few modifications, it became the introduction for the first movement. The other, which I discussed earlier in the section on orchestration, followed the same tempo and harmony as the theme but in three-part counterpoint. I worked it into the recapitulation of the first movement, played by an oboe, clarinet, and bassoon. But even after I abandoned variation form, I was attracted to the idea of closely related movements.

When I envisioned a multiple-movement work, I decided it should feel like one statement seen through multiple lenses rather than disparate parts which combine to form a whole. I wanted to give the second movement a unique identity but still feel unified with the first. Furthermore, I wanted to gradually reveal throughout the second movement that it was based on the same ideas, so that when I finally arrived at the end, listeners would have sense that everything had somehow been tied together.

I employed several different devices to achieve these goals. I wrote several other melodies based on my original theme, and used them in both movements. I incorporated smaller motives from the original theme in accompanimental figures and passage work. I also quoted several measures from the first movement at the end of the second, and added a section in the middle of the first movement that in many ways foreshadows the events of the second. The

ending of the second movement, and of the entire piece, is particularly important, as I tried to bring many different elements together for a final statement of unity.

Middle section of Movement I

The middle section of the first movement (mm. 75-132) is important to the unity of the entire work. Its character is noticeably different from the rest of the movement, and in many ways has more in common with the second movement. It begins softly in Bb minor in a slow 6/4, reminiscent of a waltz. A lone cello plays a simple repeating pattern that becomes an ostinato when it is joined by the rest of the section. Measures 75- 79 are repeated twice, each time with more layers. The downbeat of m. 90 marks a sudden shift in harmony, tempo, and texture. The timpani begins a fast, aggressive two measure pattern, with a pattern of accents that suggests a 3/8 polyrhythm against 4/4. Other instruments join in with mostly rhythmic figurations outlining a C dominant as a sustained harmony. Clarinet and violin solos play a simple canon based on the C acoustic scale. The acoustic scale is harmonically important in the second movement. Mm. 98 - 109 feature filigree work on the woodwinds and light, humorous rhythms. Mm. 110 - 115 develop the rhythms from the previous section while building to a "surprise" in mm. 116 – 118. The section closes with a reprise of mm. 90 - 98 transposed up a whole step. This particular passage foreshadows events in the second movement and helps provide a sense of unity to the work as a whole. It uses the D acoustic scale, which is heard again in the introduction of the second movement. Furthermore, the clarinet and bassoon figures in this passage, although deliberately in the background in this setting, are played in canon in the opening of the second movement in mm. 193 – 195.

Cyclic Form

I thought of certain themes in this piece as cyclic. I mean this in a rather different sense than the idea of cyclic form associated with composers like Cèsar Franck or Vincent D'Indy who sought to use a single theme as a unifying element for a monumental work; I use cyclic ideas as unifying elements, but not to fit a particular formal design. The main theme of the first movement could be thought of as cyclic in the ways it reappears and inspires other material, but instead of being restated literally it generates a collection of themes that are used in both movements.

Themes and Motives

The first two measures of the main theme of the first movement, shown in figure 5, represent the most important musical idea in the piece. These measures generate the rest of the first theme, and provide melodic and rhythmic material for other important themes. Small two- and three-note motives from this theme pervade the entire piece and are used to construct other important themes. The entire first theme, shown in figure 6, is related to its first two measures; it is built around the same motives subjected to various transformations. Motive x is a neighboring figure that is often expanded or subjected to augmentation, diminution, and rhythmic alteration. Motive y is a descending triplet; sometimes it includes the following note, other times as just the triplet. Sometimes it is used for its triplet rhythm and other times for the pitch contour. Motive z is a triplet rhythm similar to a dotted rhythm. In the third measure of the main theme, figure 6, motives x and y combine to form a new idea, motive xy. The second theme, mm. 59-75, includes several different melodies, most of which are related to the first theme in some way.

Figure 5 – Mm. 18-19

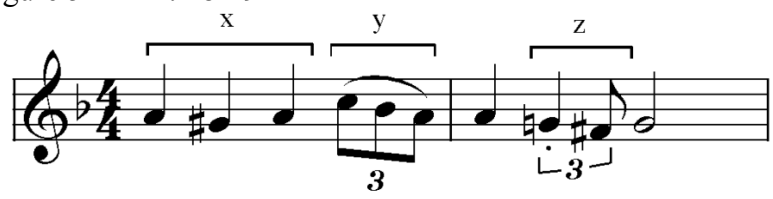


Figure 6– Vl. 1, mm. 18 - 24

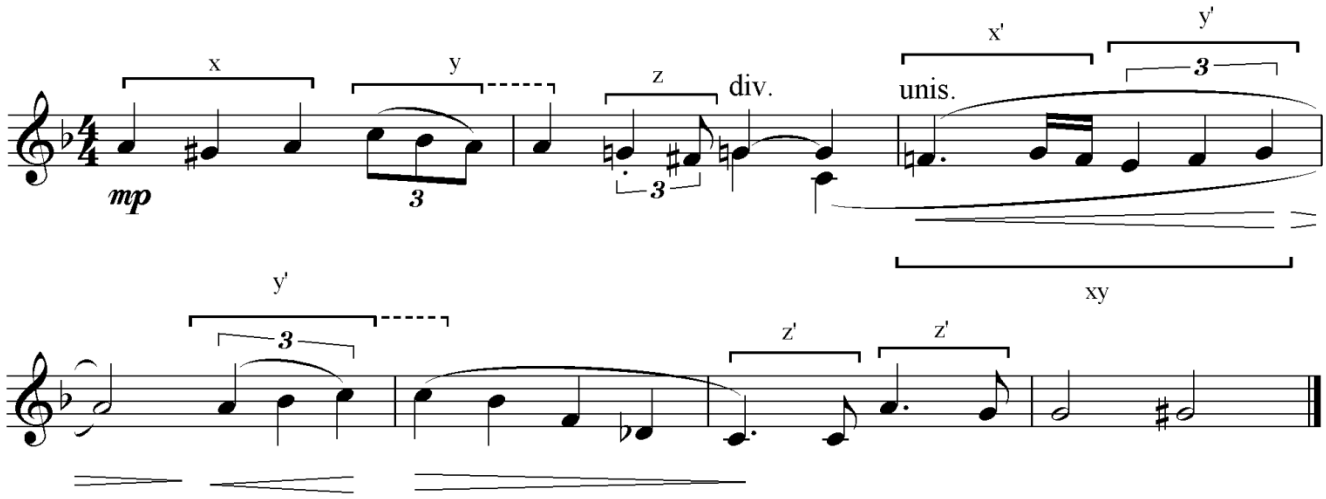


Figure 7 – Vl. 1, mm. 59 - 61

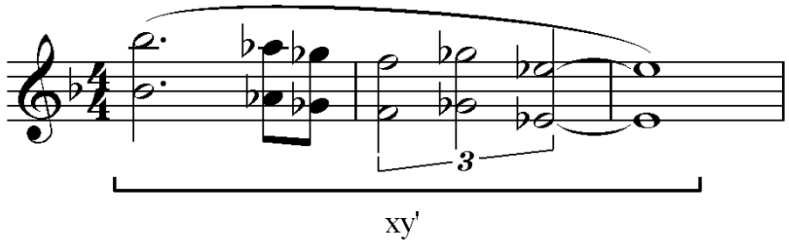


Figure 8 - Fl. 1, mm. 61 - 63

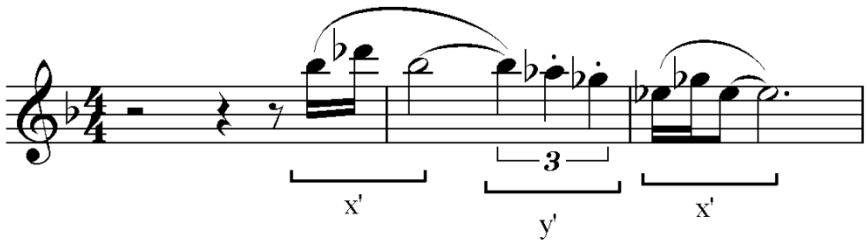


Figure 9 – Vl. 1, mm. 85 - 89

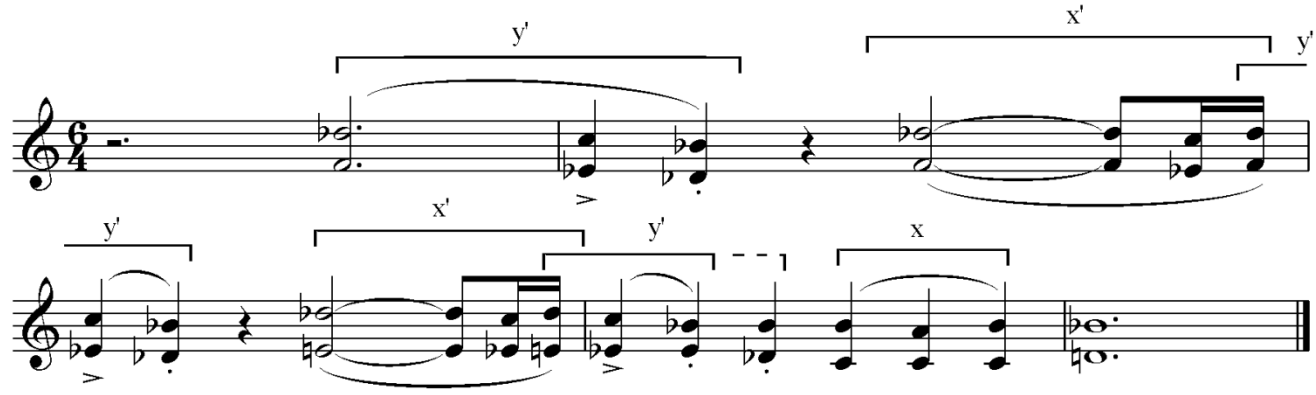


Figure 10 – Fl. 1, mm. 185 - 187

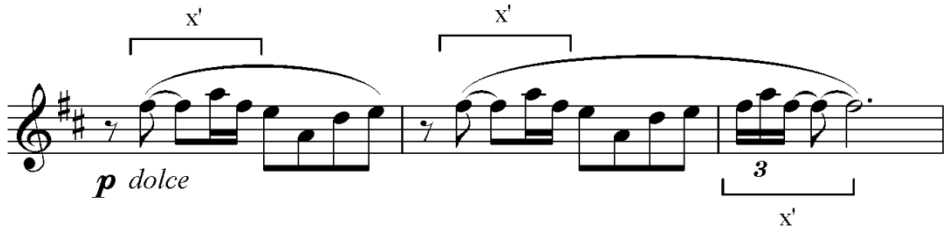


Figure 11 – Ob. 1 and Bsn. 1, mm. 247 - 249

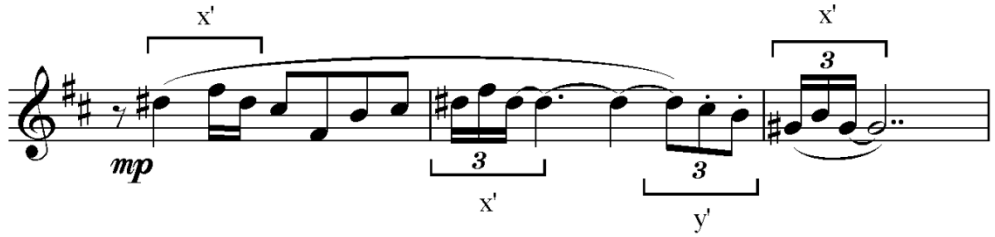


Figure 12 – Tpt 1, m. 258

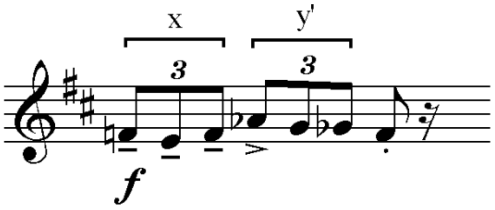
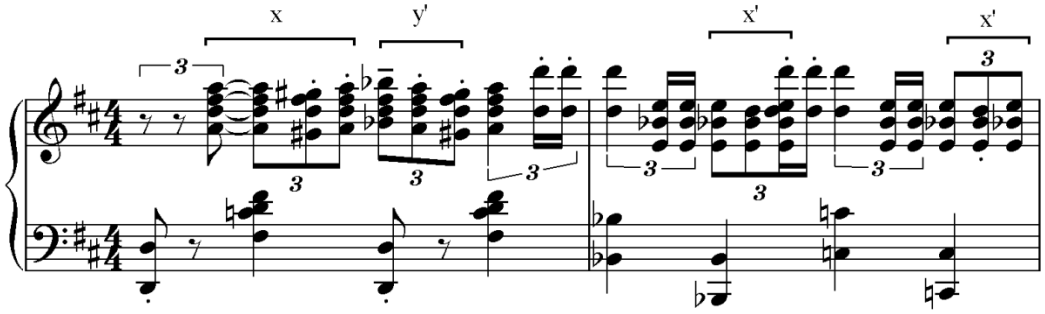


Figure 13 – Piano reduction, mm. 274 - 275



The melody in figure 7 is a variation on motive xy, while the melody in figure 8 combines motives x and y in a different way. The beginning of the middle section also features a theme related to the first measure of the first theme: mm. 85 – 89 in the violins (figure 9.) In these figures, x, y, z, and xy are used for the original form of each motive, and prime versions (x', y', etc) are used to represent various transformations of these motives. Prime versions are not all identical, i.e., x' simply means that the motive is a variant of x, which may or may not be the same as another x'.

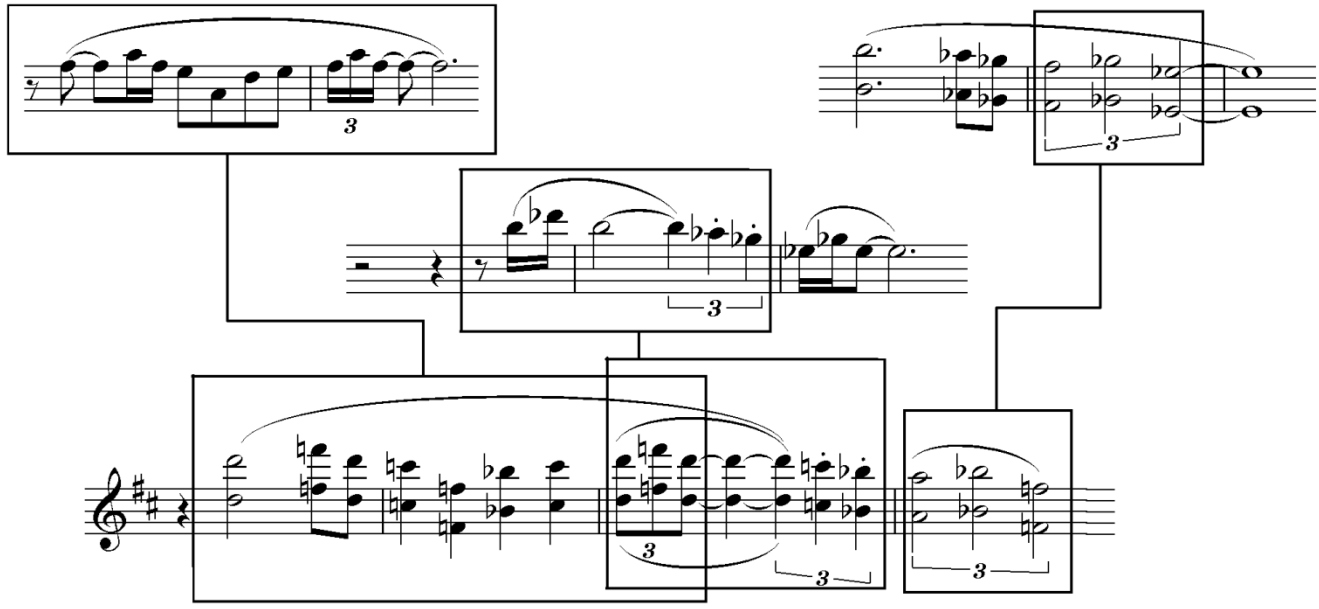
The second movement begins with a flute solo that at on the surface seems unrelated to previous material. It is mostly arpeggiated and based on the pentatonic scale. However, it actually contains two variants of motive x, as shown in figure 10. Compare the x' at the beginning of the flute solo to the x' in figure 5, the main theme of the first movement. The variant of x at the end of the flute solo bears more resemblance to the melody in figure 8, part of the second theme of the first movement. It is not until later in the movement that the melody from the flute solo begins to combine with other themes. An example of this occurs in mm. 247 – 249 on the oboe and bassoon, shown in figure 11. The flute solo and the melody from figure 7 are combined into one theme. Small fragments of this same theme from the first movement show up throughout the second movement; see mm. 200, 253 – 256, and 267 for a few examples. Measure 258 contains an altered version of the main theme from the first movement, played by a horn, trumpet, and trombone. The trumpet line is shown in figure 12.

Climax of Movement II

The section of the second movement from mm. 274 – 280 is in many ways the culmination of the work as a whole, on both a harmonic and thematic level. As I mentioned in the section on form, it resolves harmonic tension between the whole-tone scale and the diatonic scale. The harmony in mm. 274 and 276 (which are identical) is a D dominant seventh, but the fifth scale degree is only played by a moving melodic line that moves to #$\hat{4}$ and b$\hat{6}$ as neighbor tones. This makes the harmony feel very unstable. In fact, on the third beat of these measures, b$\hat{6}$ lands on a strong beat and the piccolo trills between b$\hat{6}$ and b$\hat{7}$; as a result the harmony feels more whole-tone than dominant. Mm. 275 and 277 (also identical) are entirely in the whole-tone scale. The effect of this is that diatonic material and whole-tone material can coexist in this passage without feeling like they conflict. A piano reduction of mm. 274-275 is shown in figure 13.

Following this section, material from the first movement returns in a dramatic fashion. Measures 280 – 285 recall a chain of chords used to move between the main theme and the second theme of the first movement. Measures 286 – 301 quote the second theme of the first movement almost literally, transposed so that they prepare a resolution to D major. However, the melody in mm. 286 – 289 is another combination; here, the flute solo has again been merged with the second theme melody from figure 7, but this time, another second theme melody from figure 6 has been added to the end. The following example demonstrates how the melody in mm. 269 – 289 synthesizes all these parts together:

Figure 14 – Fl. and Vl. 1, mm. 286 - 289



In the Franckian conception of cyclic form, this is where one would find a grand restatement of the cyclic theme. As I discussed, this piece does not contain one cyclic theme but rather a collection of themes based on the same ideas. This section is nonetheless a final statement of unity; playing these themes in combination shows that although they sound different and come from different contexts, they are all essentially variations of the same material.

CLOSING REMARKS

Writing this piece was a valuable learning experience in many ways. Composing a work of this scale presented challenges beyond those usually encountered when writing shorter pieces. Planning and executing a large-scale formal design takes forethought and a good deal of rearranging. Arranging a piece for a full orchestra has its own set of challenges, which are best tackled with careful study of orchestral scores and close contact with a live orchestra.

Working with student musicians provided some important lessons. The skill level of the players in the orchestra varied widely, and I learned some of the ways that skill and difficulty are different on different instruments. Some parts the orchestra handled with more facility than I expected, while other parts turned out to be more difficult than I had originally thought. I learned some things to avoid, and a few players in the orchestra pointed out when parts were awkward or uncomfortable. Working with the orchestra also demonstrated how things can sound different in different contexts. I had heard a few of the parts on their own before hearing the full orchestra, and the parts sounded quite different with the orchestra. The real orchestra of course sounded different from the MIDI playback on Sibelius, and also different from the way I imagined it. Having worked closely with a live orchestra will make it much easier to write pieces like this in the future.

Since completing this piece, I have worked on a few smaller compositions, but nothing on the same scale. I am not sure what my next large-scale work will be, but it will certainly be informed by the things I learned while working on this piece. I will have a good sense of how to use orchestral instruments, how to think about structure in a long piece, and the logistics of putting on a performance by a large ensemble.